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3 strikes, fire tower not out

Despite woes, link under way

Kate Nolan

The Arizona Republic

Jun. 14, 2005 12:00 AM

SCOTTSDALE - A construction boss' nightmare: First came baby birds, then a labor strike and finally a thorny encounter with a 20-year-old cache of explosives.

That was the trifecta that put construction of a Scottsdale Fire Department communications tower behind schedule for months.

Scottsdale had to build eight new towers to complete a state-of-the-art communications system for the new fire department, which debuts July 1. Work on the towers began in January, and all but one have been completed.

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On Monday work finally began on the last tower at a problem-plagued site near Lone Mountain Road.

The first impediment came on wings.

As crews prepared the area for construction, a neighbor told the city about a family of great horned owls nesting on nearby cliffs.

Nesting owls are protected by the state; the city agreed to postpone construction until the babies left the nest, said Deputy Chief Rich Upham, the Fire Department's project manager.

"We didn't want to disturb them," Upham said.

Construction was rescheduled to begin June 1.

That was when the crane operators union went on strike. A crane was needed to erect the 50-foot pole. The labor stoppage was settled in a week, and the project was back online for June 8.

But last Thursday, the crew dug up a 20-year old cache of explosives believed to have been left from an earlier water tank project in the area.

Bomb experts spent a day removing the hazard.

But Monday morning, work was proceeding.

The tower is expected to be operating around July 1.

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